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Viewing cable 09BUENOSAIRES461, ARGENTINA: MEDIA PRAISE FOR PRESIDENT OBAMA'S

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09BUENOSAIRES461	2009-04-21 14:20	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Buenos Aires

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1356989-la-presidenta-queria-una-relacion-mas-estrecha-con-estados-unidos>

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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: MEDIA PRAISE FOR PRESIDENT OBAMA'S
SUMMIT PARTICIPATION; CFK SATISFIED WITH OUTCOME

REF: A. BUENOS AIRES 150

[1](#)B. 08 BUENOS AIRES 1407

[1](#)C. 08 BUENOS AIRES 1703

Classified By: CDA Tom Kelly for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Argentine press reacted extremely favorably to President Obama's participation in the Fifth Summit of the Americas (SOA), describing the meetings as a new, positive beginning for U.S.-Latin American relations. In a press conference following the April 18 meeting between President Obama and UNASUR heads-of-state, President Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) praised President Obama for listening and for his sincerity, though she added that the U.S. would need to take additional conciliatory actions to address lingering Latin American distrust of the United States. Local press drew attention to the fact that CFK did not have a bilateral with President Obama and that Argentina was absent from most official and even leaked descriptions of U.S. priorities or plans for the region. Nonetheless, the media seemed to give CFK a passing grade for her perceived performance. Her opening remarks at the Summit were described as "'balanced'" despite the familiar jabs at the United States, and her call for the U.S. to lift its embargo on Cuba resonated well. For CFK's part, we hear that she was "'delighted'" with the Summit and her interaction with President Obama, though she was reportedly annoyed by negative media stories here that sought to make an issue of the lack of a bilateral with him.

¶2. (U) Although photos of President Chavez's moments with President Obama were run in virtually all papers, the Venezuela-U.S. theme did not dominate local coverage. Reporting on substance focused on Argentina's effort to attract World Bank and IDB financing, on the lack of agreement over the Summit communique, on Cuba policy, and to a lesser extent on public security. Environment and energy issues received relatively little attention. End Summary.

President Obama, Cuba Dominate Local Press

¶3. (U) Argentine press reporting on the Fifth Summit of Americas was focused on two main themes: first, President Obama's first extensive and positively received interaction with Latin American leaders and second, the question of U.S. Cuba policy (and Cuban participation in the OAS). The two themes were intertwined, as the President's announcements on dialogue with Cuba and on travel policy changes were portrayed as key examples of a more balanced and consensus-based approach to the Hemisphere by the United States. The press duly noted the calls by President Obama and Secretary Clinton for Cuba to release its political prisoners, embrace democratic reforms, and observe human rights.

¶4. (SBU) Pro-government daily "'Pagina 12"' got the ball rolling with a large front page "'I (Heart) B O"' featuring the President's face in the heart. The paper's coverage noted the positive reaction of South American heads-of-state to President Obama at the U.S.-UNASUR meeting and led with the headline: "'This is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.'"

¶5. (U) Ana Baron, U.S. correspondent for largest circulation daily "'Clarín,'" provided a glowing description of Latin American reactions to President Obama's humility and openness. She cautioned that President Obama's focus on listening aside, it appeared the USG still intended to follow its own course toward Cuba via a policy of gradualism and calling for reforms on the island rather than acceding to the consensus view of other leaders for a quick lifting of the embargo. Indeed, statements by President Obama and WH Spokesman Gibbs that the ball was in Cuba's court received fair coverage on April 19, eliciting only mild implicit criticism in left-leaning Pagina 12. Following the U.S.-UNASUR meeting, Baron noted that all of the South American heads of state appeared anxious to have an exchange or a photo taken with President Obama.

CFK: Balanced, to a Point

¶6. (SBU) Media coverage of President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's (CFK) opening speech at the SOA on April 17 was

light compared to the attention given to President Obama. Local press described her remarks as balanced, with her critiques of U.S. Cuba policy "'balanced'" by her recognition that President Obama was new in office and had taken steps to "'lift the absurd restrictions'" placed by President Bush on Cuba in 2004. She urged the U.S. to lift its "'blockade'" (sic) of Cuba. Somewhat discordantly, she contrasted U.S.

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insistence on expelling Cuba from the OAS in 1962 due to Soviet involvement on the island with the United States' "'failure to comply'" with its Rio Pact obligations of mutual assistance toward Argentina when Argentina was "'attacked (sic) by Great Britain in 1982.'" She called on the creation of a new regional order based on "'coordination, not subordination, and integration, not interference'" to replace what had been a "'traumatic relationship'" between the U.S. and the region. FM Jorge Taiana echoed these comments when he told reporters that "'the SOA demonstrated the hemisphere is in a new phase based on the recognition of the importance of dialogue, of respect, of the principle of non-intervention and cooperation.'" "

¶7. (SBU) CFK said her criticisms were not a "'reproach'" to President Obama. "'He was not responsible for the Washington Consensus nor that bipolar (Cold War) world. Indeed, he, too, may have had his civil, economic and political rights trampled due to the color of his skin.'" She also claimed that the 2005 SOA in Mar del Plata had been a "'turning point'" in hemispheric relations because "'different countries of our Americas, with different historical experiences and different ideas said no to the Free Trade Area of the Americas.'" In the wake of that rebellion, Latin America left behind "'the uncriticizing subordination to any (U.S.) proposal.'" CFK lamented that developing nations were unfairly being forced to pay the consequences of a global crisis they did not create.

¶8. (SBU) Following the U.S.-UNASUR meeting, CFK praised Obama's participation, noting that it was a "'democratic'" meeting at which all spoke and that President Obama was sincere in answering every head-of-state in turn. Slipping into critical mode, she said that "'we all suggested that an improved U.S.-Latin American relationship would require a different attitude and commitment to non-interference by the United States in the internal affairs of the other states. This hasn't been the case for 30 years.'" She alleged U.S. quiescence over an "'institutional coup'" attempt against President Evo Morales in 2008. Of the 2002 coup attempt against President Chavez, moreover, she added that the "'only government in the world which supported this endeavor was the United States,'" in turn praising President Chavez for dialoguing with President Obama despite this history.

CFK's Economic Agenda at the Summit

¶9. (SBU) With no bilateral meetings scheduled at the Summit, CFK focused her attention on firming up multilateral development bank (MDB) credits that have been in the works for some time. Local media reports on CFK's public remarks that "'we need the IDB to be recapitalized and provided with more funds. Obama told us that he will study the recapitalization (request). I believe that the study should be short and the decision needs to be made quickly.'" The President met for 10 minutes with IDB President Luis Albert Moreno on a US\$ 1.5) 1.8 billion loan package to support GOA "'social infrastructure and labor programs.'" (Note: Ref B reported on Moreno's October 2008 conversation with Ambassador on growing GOA interest in expanded IDB credits in the face of global credit crunch. The IDB was then working with the Ministries of Social Development and Labor to develop a \$1.6 billion two-year program to revamp the nation's social safety net programs. End Note.) Local media also reported on CFK's meeting with World Bank Latin American Director Pamela Cox to discuss a pending US\$ 700 million

credit to fund the Riachuelo cleanup program. (Ref C for details).

Brazil Encourages Support for Argentina

¶10. (SBU) An interesting economic subtext to the Summit were overt efforts by Brazil's President Lula and his cabinet to encourage IMF support for Argentina. (Comment: Argentina is broadly considered ineligible for new IMF financial crisis credit lines due to the unreliability of its statistics and default status on some official and private debt. WH Economic Advisor Summers' suggestion, quoted in Clarin, that countries would not qualify unless they had sound economic policies in place was read as meaning Argentina would in fact not qualify. End Comment.) In an April 16 interview with "La Nacion" that was published on Sunday, April 19, Lula remarked: "We don't think there should be an IMF delegation coming to check Argentina, Brazil, or Venezuela's accounts... We don't want that any more. We don't want missions... We don't want them to come and tell us we have to make fiscal adjustments. That's for the authority and sovereignty of each country to decide."

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¶11. (SBU) An April 20 article in "Clarin" reported that Lula called the reporter's attention to this earlier interview, noting "We gave Cristina a hand, right?" That same "Clarin" article quoted GOB sources on a meeting between National Security Advisor James Jones, GOB Defense Minister Nelson Jobim and Lula's foreign affairs advisor Marco Aurelio Garcia in which the GOB told Jones that Argentina is key to regional security and integration and that the region needs a strong GOA and a strong Argentina. The article interpreted these comments as a GOB request that the USG give Argentina political and financial support.

Where Does Argentina Fit In?

¶12. (SBU) Despite Brazil's best efforts, the negative story for the GOA out of the Summit was the repeated assertion or implication that Argentina was not of great importance to the USG's Latin American policy. Clarin's Baron quoted an unnamed White House source saying that President Obama had been interested only in five one-on-one conversations at the SOA -- with the Presidents of Colombia, Peru, Haiti and Chile and the Prime Minister of Canada.

¶13. (SBU) "La Nacion" on 19 April reported that the White House had said Colombia would be the next country in Latin America visited by the President. It also noted White House confirmation that President Obama had developed an "extensive and very good dialogue" with Brazilian President Lula. The paper noted that Argentina had not been raised among possible travel destinations and that there was no evidence of any significant dialogue between CFK and President Obama at the Summit. Other press had noted that Argentina was not among the countries mentioned by President Obama in his remarks either by name or by its capital. "La Nacion" also noted that CFK did not meet with Labor Secretary Solis, as had other heads-of-state and that her "only" bilateral with the U.S. was with "seven Members of Congress" (i.e., Codel Engel).

Venezuela: An Interesting Sidebar

¶14. (SBU) Although the photos of Presidents Chavez and Obama shaking hands or of Chavez presenting the President with a book were run in all media, the lack of U.S.-Venezuela theatrics made this a one-and-out story. Clarin ran an interview with Chavez on April 19 in which Chavez described how important he viewed the book he had presented to President Obama, Eduardo Galleano's "The Open Veins of Latin America." He confirmed his interest in "becoming friends"

with President Obama and in an improvement in Venezuelan-U.S. relations. He said that he could not imagine another Summit without Cuba's participation and referred positively to "Cristina's" (CFK's) admonition that the Hemisphere not miss a "second opportunity" to reestablish the inter-American system with Cuba included, without conditions.

CFK's Take on the Summit

¶15. (C) After debriefing his boss on his return to the MFA April 20, Foreign Minister Chief of Staff Alberto D'Alotto reported that CFK and Taiana were "delighted" with the Summit. They both were highly impressed with President Obama's charisma, noting that he communicated humility and leadership simultaneously. In the view of Argentina's leaders, the new U.S. administration got off to a very good start in a new relationship with Latin America at the Summit.

D'Alotto said that Taiana ranted about Argentine press reports that President Obama ignored CFK or treated her coolly. In fact, in Taiana's account, President Obama eagerly sought CFK out, walking across a crowded hallway to engage her. CFK, according to this version (documented by a press photo showing CFK and her aide Carlos Zanini beaming in his presence) had her share of face time with the POTUS.

Comment: Less Mileage from Anti-Americanism

¶16. (C) Although CFK stuck to some of her familiar themes in criticizing the U.S. record in Latin America, she appeared sincere in her suggestion that, from Argentina's perspective, a new beginning was possible under the Obama Administration. Memories of Kirchner and Chavez-led anti-American theatrics in 2005 at Mar del Plata were dispelled, at least for the local audience, with the upbeat photos of CFK with President Obama. With less political space for profitable anti-American posturing and little to show in terms of a positive foreign policy agenda, the CFK Administration finds

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itself without much to build on for domestic political consumption from the Summit. At a minimum, though, CFK did not make any noteworthy misstep at Port of Spain.

WAYNE